

Parents FLAG Edmonton

January 1995

NEXT MEETING:

**Tuesday
January 17
@ 7:30 pm**

Gay & Lesbian Community Ctr.
Rm 104, 11745 Jasper Ave

For further information please
phone Lynne at [REDACTED] or
phone Cindy at [REDACTED]

Coffee and juice will be
served. As always we welcome
lesbian, gay and bisexual
participation in our group.

PFLAG Non-members

(Edmonton): If you wish to
continue receiving this newsletter
we request that you send \$10

&/or participate actively in
PFLAG activities and advocacy.
Thankyou!

PFLAG Christmas Party

A gathering of PFLAG members,
their families and friends, enjoyed
an evening of conversation, good
food, and fellowship December
9th at their annual Christmas Party
-held at the Unitarian Church,
hosted by their VISION group.

A wide variety of food and
beverages was shared by all who



attended. We look forward to more
opportunities in the coming year to
share experiences and give support
to one another. It is through
continuous networking that we can
demonstrate a greater tolerance,
love and support to all human
beings in our society. Much success
to all in 1995!

...by Blanche

A big THANKYOU to Steve for
procuring the lovely Fireside Room
for this December celebration. The

cheerful, relaxing decor set a
beautiful backdrop to the
festivities. Pastor John Marsh's
company and hospitality were also
much appreciated.



PFLAG Advocacy

From those who wrote letters to
Prime Minister Chretien, Svend
Robinson, Roseanne Skoke and
their local Member of Parliament
to express their support of Bill C-
41, (Section 718.2 (a) which
expands sentencing powers to
include hate crimes based on...
sexual orientation) some of the
responses include:

*A letter of thanks with a penned
personal note added from Svend
Robinson; also a promise of further
"information as it becomes
available about this and other
issues of concern to lesbian, gay
and bisexual communities in
Canada".



*A note of thanks on behalf of the Prime Minister.

*Nothing but silence from Roseanne Skoke.

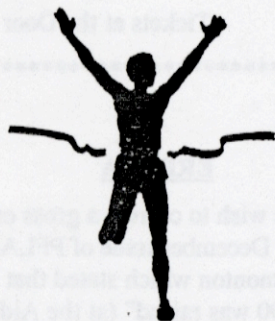


If you haven't already done so please write and add your support for Bill C-41 so that those who are victims of hate crimes against homosexuals or bisexuals have recourse to support from our law system. The addresses are as follows: (No postage required!)

*Right Honorable Jean Chretien,
Prime Minister
Langevin Block, 80 Wellington St,
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A3

*Svend Robinson, MP
House of Commons,
West Block, Room 483,
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

*Roseanne Skoke, MP
House of Commons,
Confederation Bldg., Room 630,
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6



CHALLENGING HOMOPHOBIA !

Do you want to make a New Year's Resolution that will support a family member or friend that you

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love? From the following list you may want to pick one for the year, or perhaps a different one each month would best fit your goals?

* "Come out" to one new person each month, telling them about yourself as a parent of a homosexual person and about your family and their acceptance/non-acceptance of the homosexual member(s).

* Become a member of PFLAG (Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals) and join with thousands of people from all walks of life who are working to end discrimination against lesbians, gays and bisexuals.

* Encourage open and honest discussion of gay and lesbian issues in your home, workplace and church.

* Leave a copy of PFLAG Edmonton at your office, at a dentist's or doctors's waiting room and at your local library.

* Learn more about what it is like, and not like, to live as a homosexual or bisexual person - through talking to them at home, at work, at PFLAG meetings, at church, and at any organizations that you belong to;

- through reading their biographies and autobiographies in library books, gay-positive magazines, PFLAG newsletters, etc, remembering that homosexuals, bisexuals and heterosexuals have shared this planet for thousands of years in a vast variety of cultures and societies, some of which honored homosexual love above heterosexual love.

* Support learning about sexual orientation in a positive way in our schools.

* Write to members of parliament and to your local newspapers expressing support of gay-positive legislation and lifestyle as a valuable and necessary element for a strong and enduring society.

* If you hear someone making an anti-gay comment express your disagreement/disapproval.

*Take a stand with those who believe that discrimination against anyone is a crime against humanity
- TAKE A POSITIVE STAND WITH PFLAG!



CHALLENGING HOMOPHOBIA -

- at the Toronto Board of Education

The Toronto Board of Education has taken a number of steps to address the barriers which prevent many lesbian, gay and bisexual students from achieving their full potential in our school system.

That there is a need to address these barriers is clear. Lesbian, gay and bisexual young people face discrimination, isolation, and a lack of access to information. This has resulted in a disproportionate number of these young people dropping out of school, becoming involved in substance abuse and other self-destructive behaviours. The suicide rate among lesbian, gay and bisexual youth is estimated to be three times that of their heterosexual counterparts.

Support Bill C-41. Keep our children safe.

The Toronto Board of Education has started to address a number of these barriers. Board policy states that:

*"The Toronto Board of Education condemns and will not tolerate discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, creed, colour, nationality, ancestry, place of origin, sex, **sexual orientation**, marital status, disability, age (between 18 and 65 years), in any form by its trustees, students, or employees."*

"Sexual orientation as contained herein means male or female heterosexuality, homosexuality, or bisexuality between consenting adults."



1 - Protection against Homophobic Harassment

The Toronto Board of Education's Sexual Harassment Policy **prohibits expressions of bias in any form on the basis of sexual orientation such as derogatory comments, pictures or cartoons that denigrate people because they are, or are perceived to be, lesbian or gay, harassing letters, phone calls or visits, threats and intimidation.** Individuals who feel that they are being harassed have access to a complaints procedure. A booklet outlining the Board's policy on homophobic harassment is available from the Equal Opportunity Office - 397-3335.

2 - The Human Sexuality Program

The Human Sexuality Program is a school based program that provides counselling by the Board's Student Support Services Department to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students, teachers, parents and their families. An important part of the program involves **consultations with teachers and parents, classroom presentations on homophobia to students, as well as information and resource material for the system and community at large.** For further information contact Student Support Services at 397-3755.

2(a) - Advisory Committee on Human Sexuality

3 - Resource Guide on Sexual Orientation: Focus On Homosexuality, Lesbianism, and Homophobia. Copies of this teacher's resource guide are available from the Toronto Board of Education at \$25.00 per copy - 393-0980.

4 - Support Group for Lesbian and Gay Students - who are experiencing personal difficulties, feel depressed, have questions about their sexual orientation or any other matter. L.G.B.S.T. also **provides an atmosphere where love, support and encouragement is afforded to all students, where group members can begin to grow and flourish into strong, independent and confident individuals.** For further info phone 397-3755.

5 - OK2BUS - Support group for Children with Lesbian and/or Gay Parents (397-3755)

6 - Lesbian/Gay/ Bisexual Board Employees Group (397-3755)

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7 - Print and Audiovisual Teaching Materials (397-3780 or 393-0085)

8 - Professional Development (397-3335)

9 - Equal Opportunity Office Student program workers deal with student complaints of homophobic harassment, working with and supporting gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, **developing workshops and conferences on gay and lesbian issues, and training students and staff to facilitate programs on homophobia and heterosexism.** (397-3335)



10 - Equity Studies Centre ...provides leadership by raising awareness, increasing knowledge and developing skills to challenge racism, anti-semitism, sexism, ethnocentrism, homophobia and heterosexism, classism, ageism, and discrimination against persons with disabilities. Working collaboratively with students and educators, **parents and community groups, the Equity Studies Centre designs programs and material which provide a proactive and integrated approach to infusing equity issues into the curriculum.** (397-3794)

11 - Other Initiatives:

*TEACH, (Teens Educating About and Challenging Homophobia)

* Challenging Homophobia Conference

If we don't advocate for our children, who will?



*Lesbian and Bisexual Youth Support Group

*Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth Toronto

12 - Consultative Committee on the Education of Lesbian and Gay Students ... is a committee comprised of Trustees, representatives of the Teachers Federations, **lesbian and gay parent groups**, social service agencies serving lesbian and gay youth, lesbian, gay and bisexual youth organizations, the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Board Employees Group, and appropriate Board staff. It provides a forum where policy and program issues of concern to lesbian and gay students can be raised, and provides an entry point for those concerns into the Board decision-making process. (397-3280)



"In Toronto, there are enough lesbian and gay students to fill at least two good-sized High Schools. There are many students from other parts of Metro - and beyond - who come to our schools and our support programs because none exist for them in their home areas. All of these students deserve the same standard of education, and protection from discrimination, that we set as a goal for our school system.

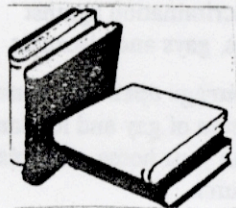
Young Lesbians and gay men in our school system are at a particularly vulnerable time (in their lives). Many have not yet "come out", and need support to find the health, social, and

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educational services that they require in order to become full participants in both the gay and the broader communities. Providing that access (to needed supports) is critical - in the area of safe sex information, in particular, it is a matter of life and death."

The foregoing is an excerpt from the "Toronto Board of Education, June 1994."

For general information contact the Public Information Office, Toronto Board of Education - 397-3220



ON THE BOOKSHELF

"UNCOMMON HEROES" - A Celebration of Heroes and Role Models for Gay and Lesbian Americans

A copy of "Uncommon Heroes" was recently received by Edmonton PFLAG. "Funds to supply every PFLAG affiliate with a book were graciously donated by Terry Watanabe and Fred Hochberg on behalf of Steve Herbits who is a hero featured in the book," writes Sandra Gilles, executive director of PFLAG Federation (An international group with hundreds of affiliates in North America, Europe, and beyond)

In this 261 page book a picture of each homosexual hero accompanies the story of her/his "uncommon" life. Examine it more closely at our January PFLAG meeting!

Events Calendar

LIATRIS CLUB

The first meeting of this new gardening club will be held at GLCC on Thursday, **January 12/95**. It intends to arrange garden tours and to enliven a part of the downtown area by planting a flower garden.

Volunteer Appreciation Party

Friday, January 13/95
7:00-9:00 PM @ GLCC

For all Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Volunteers (e.g. EVM, GALA, etc)

GALA Monthly Meeting
7:00pm, **January 18/95** at GLCC

Womonspace & EVM

A Mixed Dance

Saturday, January 21/95

Bonnie Doon Hall

8:00 PM - 1:00 AM

Tickets at the Door

ERRATA

We wish to correct a gross error in the December issue of PFLAG Edmonton which stated that "Over \$300 was raised" (at the Aids Benefit). The actual amount raised was over \$4500 and has been donated towards Aids research at the University of Alberta. Many thanks to "the Roost" for a magnificent effort!



It's a Gay Life!

January 1995

GROWING UP GAY IN RURAL ALBERTA

(Condensed from Times 10
Volume 1 No 6.)

"Generally for a small town everyone wants to get out," says Mark, who is now in his early twenties. Mark left Bonnyville at age 18 for different reasons than most, however. Mark is gay. On top of the usual adolescent worries such as grades and peer pressure, he had to come to terms with his sexuality in a rather homophobic environment. "For gay people, you have to get out," he explains. "There is simply no way to be openly gay in a town like Bonnyville, he says, "because it's very repressing. It matters what other people think in a small town," he says....

"I started smoking when I was 13," he says. He started mainly because of peer pressure, he says, and the group of kids he hung around with in junior high and high school might be classified as "the bad crowd".

"We did everything we wanted to as kids," recalls Mark. "The drinking and drugs were an easy way to block out the pain he was feeling," he recalls. It was around the age of 12 or 13 that he began to realize he didn't feel the same about dating and sex as his male peers did.

"I can remember in grade 7... watching Dad's pornos and

looking for the men in it,
checking out the men and not the



women," he says. Although he started to recognize his homosexual orientation at this age, he didn't feel as though he had to prove anything yet. "In junior high there isn't much pressure to begin dating," he explains. "In high school, there was pressure to do something there to stop people from talking. It was getting tougher. **How do you hide this?**" he asks. "I was dating women for a bit," he notes, but he knew it wasn't right for him.

When Mark was 18 he met another young man to whom he realized he was very attracted. It took several months, however, before the two of

them could admit the mutual attraction. Within a year he moved to another town with his lover. "I don't know if it was escape," he muses. "You've got to leave the town and find out who you really are inside" he explains. Mark says if he hadn't left Bonnyville he is quite sure he never would have been able to "come out" or admit his homosexuality openly.

"I would still be drinking a lot. I would very much be avoiding (the issue)," he says, stating in all seriousness that, "Suicide was an option."

These teen years were very lonely years for Mark. He says he felt very depressed most of the time while he tried to conceal a very big part of himself.

Matters were only made worse by the fact that he could not talk about what was bothering him without actually stating that he was gay. "It's a vicious circle. You don't want to tell them you're gay. To talk about your feelings would mean you have to come out. And then you get more depressed."

Just before Mark moved again, this time to Edmonton, he was able to come to terms with his sexual orientation and was finally able to come out to a few friends and family members. "Coming out to my mother was not a big thing," he recalls. "We cried and talked." It wasn't too difficult to talk to his mother, he says, because he has



several gay relatives. "She still asked the questions like "What could I have done to prevent you from being gay?"

After Mark moved out of Bonnyville for good, he stopped doing drugs. That decision had a lot to do with his lover at the time, as well as being out of a repressive environment. Going to school everyday stoned was a bit much," he admits. If there was any sort of support for gay youth in the community, he says, it might have been easier for him. "If I could have talked about it earlier, I wouldn't have had to drink so much. I dealt with my problems that way."

Mark was friends with two Bonnyville high school students who have come out to him as lesbians recently, he says. Although he doesn't claim to speak for them or any other gay or lesbian youth, he notes there are similarities in their experiences. All of them had to move away from the town and drugs and alcohol were also a big part of trying to cope for one of them, he says. As he recalls his high school years in Bonnyville flashes of anger appear in his eyes.

"I'm angry that there was nothing there to help me. You're really scared to talk to anyone," he says. "If you talk to your parents, they flip out." **Most small towns don't have anyone to talk to about the issues surrounding homosexuality,** he says. "There's that 'guilty by association' syndrome." Mark says he would really like to get up a gay and lesbian support centre in the Bonnyville area to provide support for people in the surrounding area. He says he knows there are enough gays and lesbian in the area to warrant such a group.

"If I could have gone to (a support centre) I would have," he says.



"Caution would be needed if one were to set up such a centre," he notes, because people are always worried about the "recruiting" of youth. There are youth who are confused and depressed because they worry they might be gay or lesbian," Mark says, **"and if there were a centre where they could talk about their concerns without fear, (then) drinking, drug abuse, and even suicide might not be the first choice for these youth. This way, they are sure of it either way,"** he says.

While Mark has come out to most of the people in his life, he has yet to talk to his father about his homosexuality. It's one of the few things he has left to deal with here. "I've dealt with everything (in Bonnyville)," he says. "The only one who can bash me is me."

"I haven't had a lot of bad experiences with homophobia," Mark notes. He says he sees homophobia as the reaction of people who "see that they're attracted to the same sex and have to gay bash out of fear. Homosexuality is a choice to some extent," he adds. "I could have forced myself to marry a woman

It's a Gay Life!

and have kids," he says. He chose not to live his life as a lie anymore because, "It would have killed me."

When confronted with the opinion that homosexuality is fine as long as it is kept in the closet, Mark has a strong response, "If heterosexuals want homosexuals to hide their emotions and actions away, then heterosexuals should not flaunt their sexual orientation either..."

Mark is currently enjoying life in the city. He spends his time at work, taking walks, reading all sorts of books, and visiting with friends. "I'm single and enjoying it. I was very co-dependent for a while when I first came out. Now I'm just exploring myself day by day," he says, "which is nothing out of the ordinary for most people in their twenties."

Growing up gay in a town like Bonnyville was not the easiest thing to have to go through," he concludes. "I tried to keep it hidden as well as possible. Now I try to be myself," Mark says. "I'm not going to hide it now."

